



final report

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Workforce retention and training in meat processing plants

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Background

The Workforce retention project has been underway since mid 2004. The project sought to initially research and investigate the possible causes of high turnover and then to develop tools and resources to allow processing companies in the meat industry to improve their retention rates and to lower absenteeism.

Julie McQueen was the first project officer involved in this project, however approximately halfway through the two-year project Sharon Fitzgerald and Jenny Kroonstuiwer took on the project management role.

During the first year of the project some valuable research data was developed, including a literature review, which was made available to industry and identified the possible causes of turnover, particularly in the meat industry; there was also an analysis of high- and low-turnover companies, and research into how shut-down periods impacted upon retention levels once companies resumed normal working production levels.

Employees' entry to an organisation was a big part of the project. Significant information was sought to determine the necessary skills and attributes needed by supervisors in processing plants, when dealing with new recruits, and a new unit was included in the meat industry Training Package, *Supervise new recruits*. Along with the unit of competency training materials were developed to support training in the unit and were trialled with several companies to ensure they were effective.

Induction training was also an area of interest. A generic induction program was developed to be turned into a product for the entire industry.

Traineeships in the industry were also researched, with a particular focus on finding out what trainees themselves had to say about their training and how they might be better supported. An updated version of the traineeship induction kit was then produced for evaluation and trial, and to complement the materials a new page was added to the MINTRAC website.

This is the final milestone report for this project.

Evaluation outcomes

Supervise new recruits

As reported in the previous milestone report the first supervisor pilot participant, E G Green and Sons, were found to have experienced significant improvements in employee retention rates and improved relationships between new recruits and supervisors as a result of the initial supervisor training.

The materials were then re-worked, and pilots using the improved materials were conducted in the following companies:

- Nolan Meats, Gympie QLD – 22 & 29 June 2005
- Stanbroke Beef, Gatton QLD – 11 & 18 July 2005
- Kilcoy Pastoral Company, Kilcoy QLD – 3 & 12 October 2005

- Swickers Bacon Factory, Kingaroy QLD scheduled for 4 and 13 October 2005. The first day went ahead, but with only four participants. The second day was cancelled
- WAMMCO International, Katanning WA – 16 & 17 November 2005
- CRF Colac, VIC, 1 & 2 February 2006.

In total there were 55 supervisor participants in all of the pilots. Some pilots were more successful than others owing to situational factors, however, overall the training program generated a very positive response from the industry.

Numbers in some pilots were low in some plants because the training (except the pilot at CRF) was conducted on-site which meant that supervisors were easily accessible if required to deal with pressing production requirements. Absenteeism in production areas also caused some supervisors to miss out on training altogether.

The training or human resource managers of all companies who participated were contacted by email and asked to forward any evaluation data they had regarding the pilots, such as pre- and post-training retention and turnover figures. Two of the companies, Swickers and Nolan Meats have had training managers leave the company and replaced by staff not necessarily familiar with the pilot program and at this stage are not able to provide any feedback data. CRF has also had a change in training managers, and have also not provided and post-course retention data.

One company's data indicated that turnover has decreased marginally since the supervisor, although their data does not specifically attribute the change to the supervisors training. Another company were only able to provide post training data, and stated that their turnover rate was now 30%. However, the previous turnover rate is not known so it is unclear whether this is an improvement or not.

All supervisor participants in the pilots were asked by the facilitator, Andrew Moore, to complete evaluation sheets at the end of the training, which he then forwarded to MINTRAC. All responses have been positive and ratings of facilitator performance were generally very high, the rating level around the 4-5 out of a possible rating of 5. The supervisors generally felt the training to be relevant and interesting, and written comments were also positive.

Companies were very appreciative of Andrew's training delivery.

In particular, positive comments and feedback have been received regarding Andrew's extensive industry experience and how that affected the participants' perceived relevance of the pilot training.

Despite agreements which required the companies to provide MINTRAC with pre- and post-course retention data having been written and signed by companies there is very little retention or turnover data available from companies who participated in the pilots, and this is somewhat disappointing. Some companies are reluctant to provide turnover figures as they do not regularly track retention or turnover. It would also be difficult to determine whether or not an increase or decrease in turnover is attributable to the supervisors having taken part in the training. However the qualitative feedback is very encouraging. What little data there is available shows that there have

been small increases in retention rates which might be attributed to the supervisor training.

The materials have now been edited and some final adjustments made by both Andrew Moore and MINTRAC. There are optional training materials, assessment tools and an evidence map. The materials will be available on CD and included with the other training materials from the Certificate IV Meat Processing (Leadership) qualification that MINTRAC currently sells for \$220.00 and \$110.00 for AMPC members. The *Supervise new recruits* materials will also be available separately for companies who already have the other training materials from the Leadership qualification. This will be available for \$30.00, and \$15 for AMPC members.

Induction manual

The draft form of this manual was reviewed and trialled by a number of companies

Four companies were happy with the manual as it was and had no comments to make, or suggestions for improvement. These companies did not provide any retention data, or make any mention of any impact the manual had upon their turnover levels. One company was able to provide MINTRAC with a great deal of feedback, which was detailed in the December 2005 milestone report. They made many improvements to their existing induction program, and provided some comments regarding improving the manual. Their most significant improvement included extending the induction training program, however they found that five days was too long a period of time and modified the program to three days. They also made a commitment to their inductees that they would allow them to complete the entire induction program and not be removed from the training to relieve production pressures. The training manager indicated that of the around 90 employees they had employed during the time of the trial, almost 100% were still with the company when the information was provided to MINTRAC.

In light of the comments received, the manual was updated to include more detail about how it may be used and by whom, and also to encourage company customisation. This is because the company customised the manual a great deal and found that their version of the manual worked very well for them.

The manual has now been available for sale for over two months, and sales have been quite steady, averaging around two manuals ordered per week. The price of the manual is \$110.00, and \$55.00 for AMPC members.

Traineeship induction kit

The traineeship kit has been updated to support the recommendations from the traineeship research report, which was included with the previous milestone report.

The draft version of these materials was sent to several processing companies, RTOs, and industry representatives.

The companies were also sent an evaluation sheet to fill out and return to MINTRAC. Only one company did not provide any feedback. The remaining

companies found the updated kit to be useful and relevant to the industry. One suggestion for improvement was to have the traineeships available explained in more detail, as well as the competencies required. It would not be useful to go into detail explaining the current traineeship qualifications and their competencies as the MTM00 training package is about to be replaced with the MTM06, which has changes to some units of competency, other units have also been added or removed as necessary.

Four of the companies indicated that they would recommend the product to other companies employing trainees. The feedback sheets included a question about the impact of the program on retention rates. One company was not able to quantify the impact the program had, if any, on their retention rates, while another commented that in their opinion it would impact retention rates, but also were unable to quantify any improvements.

The kit has not changed from the original draft, aside from some spelling and typing corrections, and is now available to order. The price will be \$220.00, and \$110.00 for AMPC member companies.

Webpage

To support the kit a webpage specifically designed for traineeships has been developed, which can be accessed free of charge. The webpage can be found on the MINTRAC website.

The website has some of the same information as the kit, but also has answers to frequently asked questions, and links to other training related websites. The website is designed so there is information specifically for trainees, and information specifically for trainers and/or managers. This webpage has been operational since mid-June, and has been featured in the *MINTRACker*.

Case Studies

Three case studies were also developed, to highlight examples of good practice, and where a traineeship may eventually lead to. These case studies are included in both the kit and the webpage.

Recent meat industry traineeship data

MINTRAC has recently received some updated statistics on traineeship commencement and completion rates. A summary of these statistics is available.

While total commencements are increasing over the two year period, total completion rates are declining, particularly among male trainees, and NESBs. Female, Indigenous, Rural and Remote completion rates increased, but only slightly. Overall there are more than ten times the number of trainees commencing Certificate II traineeships than there are commencing Certificate II level training.

From these figures the estimated completion rate for 2004 is around 43% and the completion rate for 2005 is 39%. The figures however don't take into account trainees that take longer than one year to complete their training. Nor do the figures include traineeships that take longer than one year, or

traineeships that have commenced half way through the year, and which would not be completed until mid-way through the following year.

The figures do seem to indicate however that overall completion rates are declining and that this is a good time to have developed a product which aims to provide trainees with more information and support.

Women are participating more in training, which is encouraging. Both total female commencement and completion rates show an increase. Females appear to be predominantly gaining Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs), and Certificate III Meat Processing (Boning).

NESB participation is also increasing, particularly in Certificate II Meat Processing (Abattoirs), and Certificate III Meat Processing (Meat Retailing).

Implementation workshops

The three products previously described have been featured as agenda items in each Training Manager Network Meeting held during the first half of 2006. Sharon Fitzgerald travelled to meetings in Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Wagga Wagga, Tamworth and Perth to provide those in attendance with an overview of the products, which companies they would suit best, their expected prices and a timeframe of when they would be available. Attendees also had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and to provide feedback on the materials.

An induction workshop was also featured at the 2006 MINTRAC National Conference, the workshop was conducted by Lilly Hope, who developed the manual. The feedback received from this workshop was very positive, with some audience members commenting that Lilly had made them rethink the way they currently dealt with induction training.

The project will also be presented at the National OH&S Conference in August 2006. This will be a good opportunity to showcase the project outcomes and increase industry awareness of workforce training and retention.

Electronic newsletter and industry article

Throughout the duration of the project three bulletins have been developed and distributed to human resource and training managers in processing companies and RTOs. A fourth and final bulletin has been developed.

An article has also been developed for submission to *Feedback*, the MLA publication. MINTRAC has also been contacted by an AMIEU representative to submit articles from the MINTRACker newsletter for use in AMIEU branch journals and newsletters. It is anticipated that one of these articles will feature the retention project.

The previous milestone report featured *Workforce retention and training* articles that have appeared in the MINTRACker. The June 2006 issue of MINTRACker also features a retention article.

Final products

The final products from the Workforce retention project are now ready to be distributed to the industry. The Induction manual has been available since March 2006 and has been selling well. The products are advertised in the *MINTRACker newsletter*, MINTRAC product catalogue and the Order online section of the MINTRAC website. The following list shows the prices of each product.

- Induction manual - \$110.00, \$55.00 for AMPC member companies.
- *MTMP407A Supervise new recruits* training materials, assessment tools and evidence map - \$30.00, \$15.00 for AMPC member companies.
- Traineeship induction kit - \$220.00, \$110.00 for AMPC member companies.
- Traineeship support webpage – materials can be accessed and downloaded free of charge.
- Literature review – emailed free of charge, postage and handling charged if a hard copy is requested.
- Traineeship research report - emailed free of charge, postage and handling charged if a hard copy is requested.
- Workforce retention and training bulletin – emailed to listed recipients in database, a hard copy can be posted free of charge on request.